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ABSTRACT

Using a "teaching case" format, this report tells the story of a married couple, Caroline and Rick, who travel to a village school in rural Alaska for their student teaching experience. Although each student teacher engages in innovative teaching practices, the faculty of the school perceives them to lack dedication to the teaching profession. The principal and cooperating teachers do not give them positive recommendations and they have trouble finding teaching positions the following year. Part I of the case study provides background and a context for the story. Part II presents the story first from Caroline's viewpoint, and then from Rick's viewpoint. Discussion questions at the end of Part II raise issues presented in the case such as the school culture, attitude of a student teacher, and the format of student teaching experiences. Appendix A is an open letter to student teachers written by one of Rick's cooperating teachers. The university supervisor discusses his view of the case in Appendix B. (KS)

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A Student Teacher's Troubled Teaching Experience in Rural Alaska

Revised edition
Edited by Judith Kleinfeld

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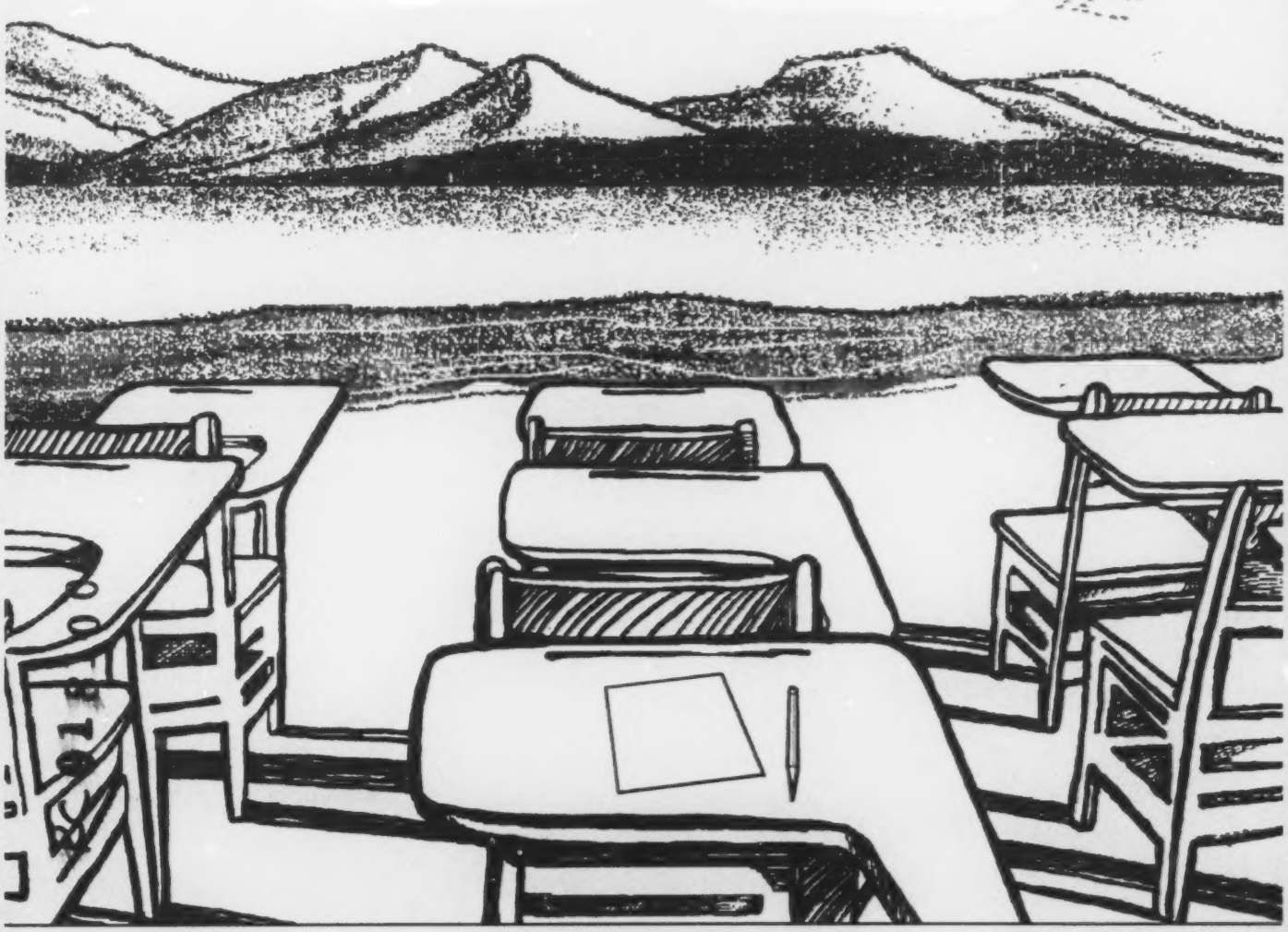

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No. 5

A Student Teacher's Troubled Teaching Experience in Rural Alaska

Anonymous

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Center for Cross-Cultural Studies
College of Rural Alaska
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Introduction

A Student Teacher's Troubled Teaching Experience in Rural Alaska tells the story of two student teachers who come to a village school with the best of intentions but somehow the worst happens. The principal and their cooperating teachers do not give them a positive recommendation and they have trouble finding any teaching positions the following year. What exactly went wrong? What can you learn from their experience to help you negotiate the student teacher role?

A Student Teacher's Troubled Teaching Experience in Rural Alaska is not simply a narrative, one teacher's story. It is intended to be a "teaching case"—a description of events written to help students reflect upon the complex, ambiguous situations which arise in rural teaching. Teaching cases have long been a cornerstone of professional preparation in schools of business and law. Only recently has the field of education begun to explore their value in the preparation of teachers (Doyle, 1986; Shulman, 1987; McCarthy, 1987).

The teaching case is intended to capture the ambiguities of real-world teaching (Schon, 1983). Cases provide vicarious experience, the opportunity to reflect on common and complex dilemmas before encountering them. In the teaching case, interpretations are left open and loose ends are not tied. Relevant information is not known, and known information is not necessarily relevant. The purpose of the case is not to establish "truth" but rather to prepare students for "wise action" (Christensen and Hansen, 1987). Professional practice demands wise action, even where the truth neither is nor can be known.

Representativeness of Teaching Cases and the Author's Point of View

A Student Teacher's Troubled Teaching Experience in Rural Alaska is one of a series of teaching cases written for education students by teachers

and student teachers who have observed or participated in the events they describe. This case was *not* selected because it is "representative" of teaching situations in rural Alaska. It was selected because it presented, in a concrete and dramatic way, an especially difficult teaching situation that students would benefit from reflecting upon.

The author of this case was a student teacher; she is the "Caroline" of this story. We include as well the perspective of the cooperating teacher in an open letter written to rural student teachers and also the perspective of the university supervisor in a commentary following the case. But you are seeing events primarily through Caroline's and Rick's eyes. Think about the limitations of this perspective. Nonetheless, keep in mind that you, too, can live only in your own skin. You, too, will have to come to an interpretation of situations from the perspective that you have.

Questions To Focus Discussion of a Case

Teaching cases such as this one are intended to develop students' abilities to spot issues and frame problems in an ambiguous, complex teaching situation, interpret the situation from different perspectives, identify crucial decision points and possibilities for action, and recognize the possible consequences of alternative actions. In stimulating such reflection, we have found useful the following general kinds of questions. Most have been culled from the Instructor's Guide to *Teaching and the Case Method* (Christensen, Hansen, and Moore, 1987) and from discussions about case method teaching (Christensen and Hansen, 1987).

These questions are:

1.What are the central issues in this situation?

2.What, if anything, should anyone do? Who? When? How? Why do you think so?

3.How does this situation appear to other participants such as the students, teachers, principal, or parents? Why do you think so?

4.How did this situation develop? How might you avoid it? What, if anything, might alter the basic conditions which created the present difficulties?

5.What, if anything, have you learned from this case?

A Student Teacher's Troubled Teaching Experience in Rural Alaska is most helpful to students when taught just before they themselves begin student teaching. While some of the problems the Wexlers found seem idiocyncratic (such as Caroline's pregnancy), or limited to rural Alaska (such as the care of the dog team), the case raises fundamental issues about the allocation of time and energy and the competing demands of professional roles and personal lives.

Issues Raised in A Student Teacher's Troubled Teaching Experience in Rural Alaska

Since an important goal of case discussion is to develop students' abilities to spot issues, we do not want to identify in this introduction too many of the issues in this case. We point out that much profitable discussion centers around the way the Wexlers negotiated the student teaching role in the school and community. Consider the friends they allied themselves with. Consider their early behavior and what attitudes it communicated. Think about attitude, what it is, and why people consider it so important. Students may find it helpful to identify the tasks and problems of the student teaching role, particularly in the culturally diverse settings of rural Alaska.

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List of Characters

Caroline Wexler	a new student teacher with an English specialty in the village of Seal Point
Rick Wexler	a new student teacher with a social studies and computer specialty in the village of Seal Point
Don Damart	principal at Seal Point
Edwin Jamison	Caroline's cooperating teacher and Rick's expected mentor
Karen Mueller, Ned Brady, Joanne Kirk, Jon Kirk	other faculty at Seal Point whose classes Caroline and Rick Wexler took over

Part I:

Background and Context

Beginnings

Caroline had never considered teaching to be her life's work; she had finished college ten years earlier with a major in marketing and her career had always been centered in the city. But her husband, Rick, was offered a city planning position in southeast Alaska, and the Wexlers decided to make the move. After a few summers spent traveling in interior Alaska, they had fallen in love with the country.

Caroline was as romantic as Rick was practical, and she finally had her way. She convinced him to move to a community on the Canadian border and set up his own consulting business. There they honed their rural skills. Caroline gardened, canned, and put up the meat that Rick had hunted. They smoked salmon for winter. They acquired dogs to help them with their chores of hauling wood and water and trapping in the winter.

The consulting business was not as profitable as they had hoped and they knew that eventually they would have to move to a larger city. Then they met Bill, a teacher who told them about a job taking care of dogs in the village of Kaavik. Rick tried to convince Caroline they would be going to a place even smaller than the Canadian border town and it would be impossible to find work in the winter time. She figured it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live in the Arctic, and besides, it was only for six months. Since all expenses would be paid, the move seemed the economical thing to do. Perhaps it was best to wait until summer to return to the city to look for work anyway, Rick thought, and agreed to go.

Rick and Caroline arrived in Kaavik just after winter solstice. Daylight broke clear mauve skies and the crisp forty below temperatures invigorated them. The Wexlers began to make friends both within the school and within the Native community. To the Wexlers' surprise, the principal asked them to substitute teach. The school was having problems with some of the teachers, and there were plenty of opportunities to earn money subbing at the school. The Wexlers managed to stay out of school gossip which made them popular substitutes. Rural Alaska teaching, they realized, could be very profitable and lots of fun, too.

The students at Kaavik shared the problems of many rural kids. Yet in spite of absenteeism, alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, family violence, and low test scores, family and community commitments were strong. The kids were curious, bright, and outgoing. The school was an exciting place to be; things were always happening and the students kept the teachers hopping until late in the evening. Although Rick and Caroline had never considered teaching as a career, the idea began to simmer. The teachers at Kaavik liked what the Wexlers were doing. The principal hoped Caroline would start a school newspaper and work with the Girl Scouts; he wanted Rick to teach a computer class and work with the Junior Mushers. People from Kaavik community said they hoped the Wexlers would stay in Kaavik. So, on that crisp March day when the principal stopped to talk to Caroline about the new rural teaching program at University of Alaska Fairbanks, it came as no surprise.

Should they return to school at UAF that fall and begin careers as teachers? The Wexlers knew rural Alaska was a place they wished to live in for a long time; they also knew that, by becoming teachers, they would be able to make a living in an isolated place, using their experiences to better the lives of their students who, in turn, might better the lives of the people in the community.

The Wexlers went to Fairbanks in August to attend school. It was a shock to be in the city again after living in Kaavik. Most teachers love to get out of the village and back to civilization, but both Rick and Caroline felt depressed and confused. They had to meet the expectations of so many people now, and Kaavik seemed so far away. They couldn't believe it, but they were homesick!

Fall semester consisted of a hefty course load and a practicum at a local school. All of the students in the program were excited and curious about where they would be student teaching. The Wexlers wanted to return to Kaavik, but they found that the principal that year was new to the community. The principal was hesitant to accept two student teachers into the

school when most of the staff were new and he was a first-year principal. He suggested that Rick and Caroline go to another school to student teach.

Rick and Caroline were extremely upset because they had planned their student teaching for months. Caroline wanted to continue work with the student newspaper and Rick had hoped to teach the new computer class. The science teacher really wanted Rick to return and teach that class. But Rick would be certified in social studies, and the UAF student teaching coordinator felt that he should do student teaching with a social studies teacher. The English/social studies teacher at Kaavik was in his second year and too inexperienced for the mentor role, or so the UAF coordinator thought. Caroline would also have to work with that same teacher because she would be certified in humanities.

The UAF coordinator looked around for a placement somewhere else in that school district. Several teachers suggested Edwin Jamison. He had been teaching Social Studies and English in Seal Point for seven years. He had taken the Writer's Consortium, was well-liked by his students, and was active in National Education Association (NEA) politics, which made him a popular choice with the teachers.

Rick and Caroline called the principal in Seal Point. The principal, a terse and serious man, said that he would give Rick and Caroline excellent student teaching experience. He felt the Wexlers would be better off in Seal Point than Kaavik because Seal Point had long-term teachers, a supportive community, and an excellent curriculum. He also made it clear that Rick and Caroline had to make a decision soon because he was extremely busy that year.

The UAF coordinator urged the Wexlers to accept the Seal Point offer. But the expense of flying to Seal Point was astronomical, $1,040.00 one way! They would have to charter because they couldn't find a caretaker for their twelve sled dogs. Caroline was three months pregnant, and they had to decide soon about where they would go to student teach. The Wexlers urged their UAF coordinator to work something out with Kaavik, but the principal wanted to wait to talk to his Advisory School Board (ASB) about

the possibility of having Rick and Caroline student teach there. Rick and Caroline were convinced that Kaavik wasn't going to call back in time to meet the Seal Point principal's deadline for confirmation, so they called Seal Point and accepted.

Three days later, the Kaavik principal called and said it would be okay if Rick and Caroline came to student teach in Kaavik; the ASB approved them. But it was too late.

Arrival—Sort of

Friends helped the Wexlers load their gear and twelve sled dogs into the plane. Nasty weather is not unusual in the Arctic during early January, and their pilot, Greg, told them they might have to turn back if the weather got worse. Rick and Caroline Wexler had flown with Greg in his small single engine Cessna several times and his Bush pilot savvy and steel nerves always put them at ease. He urged the Wexlers to hurry with the loading so that they could arrive before darkness fell. The plane was overloaded by about five-hundred pounds.

Greg started up the engine, turned to Rick, and said, "As long as we can get our tail up, we can make it! If not, we'll have to unload some of this extra weight." The tail did go up, but visibility was marginal and the wind currents vicious. The plane was being tossed and dropped in the air like a toy ship on ocean waves. Later Greg said he'd thought the Cessna might flip. Greg was chewing tobacco and biting his nails and had his earphone tuned to the weather at all times. One of the dogs got sick all over Rick, which made Caroline sick, too. She turned greenly to Rick and said with a wry smile, "I think Greg is swallowing his snuff." They both smiled and knew they'd never make it to Seal Point that day. Greg must have been thinking the same thing. He could only take them as far as Kaavik, he said, because gas was running low, the storm was getting worse, and darkness was creeping in. Rick and Caroline were glad to get out of the air. Upon landing, Caroline's door flew open and she gave Greg a bewildered look. "Funny, I thought we locked that," he said.

It was fifty-five degrees below and they were in Kaavik. Greg helped Rick picket the dogs at the airport and unload gear. Rick asked him if they'd be going to Seal Point tomorrow. Greg said, "You can call me and check the weather. I can't take off if it's colder than thirty below."

The Wexlers got on Greg's snowmachine and went to make a surprise visit to a friend in the village. It was exciting and disheartening to be in Kaavik again. It seemed so unfair that they still had to go on to Seal Point. This strange turn of events made Caroline nervous, but she pushed negative thoughts from her mind and decided that a little visiting would cheer them up. It was 8 P.M., and they had been flying since 2:30. It would be good to see familiar faces.

The weather in Kaavik turned colder. Kaavik remained the coldest spot in the state at sixty degrees below zero for a week. Almost everyone in the village had the Taiwan flu, and no one traveled or went outdoors except in emergencies. Rick came down with a fever of one-hundred and five degrees and Caroline felt ill also. It was too difficult to feed the dogs at the airport, so Rick had to move the team into town.

After about four days of being sick, the Wexlers emerged from their friend's cabin and decided to visit Kaavik's science teacher. Mike Post was sitting in the school shop working on his freight sled. Other sleds of varying designs in various stages of completion surrounded him. "The kids really like having the shop going again," Mike said. "It gives them something tangible and useful to take home." Mike taught shop, math, and computers, as well as science. In the Wexlers' eyes, Mike was one of the best rural teachers in that district. He always had something constructive to say about teaching in Kaavik, and he tried to involve the kids in projects and other activities that got students excited and motivated about school. To Rick and Caroline, Mike embodied characteristics that they would like to develop in their own teaching style.

Mike's science classroom was a menagerie of sorts. A large terrarium housed salamanders, newts, and a grubworm box full of rotting potato

skins (he used the grubworms to feed the terrarium dwellers). Two hamsters inhabited a cage with an elaborate trail running along one wall of the classroom. Mike's desk sat behind a one–hundred gallon aquarium filled with an assortment of fish, where he peered through the tank at his class when he was at his desk. Mike's room also contained eight computers for the students and a Macintosh for himself with a wide variety of software available to everyone. Many plants, algae, and fungi stared over desks. Mastodon bones that had been unearthed in the area and paper hot air balloons that students were experimenting with were prominently displayed. Mike also showed Rick and Caroline the unusual paper and clay flowers that students had made. "They are creating their own species of plants and the insect that would assist in pollination. We made a video where the kids describe their plants and it's just great. They have quite an imagination." Mike's enthusiasm was contagious and the Wexlers were drawn into his activities as easily as the students. Even though Mike was sick with the flu, he took four hours on a weekend to show Rick and Caroline his lesson plans, unit design, most recent exam, and various computer programs about which he asked Rick for his assistance and advice. Mike wished Rick and Caroline good luck student teaching at Seal Point and expressed his disappointment that they would not be working together that spring, but promised to keep in touch.

The cold weather finally broke the next day, and the Wexlers left Kaavik.

Arrival at Seal Point—Finally

Rick and Caroline landed in Seal Point two days prior to the date their student teaching was to begin. Don Damart, the principal, met them at the airport, and seemed surprised to see them stuffed into a plane with twelve dogs. Caroline actually had no idea who picked them up from the airport. Mr. Damart never bothered to introduce himself. Later, he welcomed them to Seal Point, and mentioned that he had expected them several weeks ago. "When we last talked, you mentioned that you might come as early as Christmas," he said. The Wexlers reminded him that they had called a couple of times stating that, due to weather and plane

mix-ups, they couldn't have arrived any sooner. With a snowmachine and sled, Don helped them haul their gear to the house they had arranged to rent.

The Wexlers thought they would require at least two days to thoroughly unpack, settle the dogs, and prepare for their teaching duties. Two teachers came by to greet them and to inquire when they planned to begin student teaching. The message seemed to be: "We need you, hurry up and start to work!" Rick was both pleased and bothered by this; on the one hand, he didn't think it right to hurry them, on the other hand he was glad that the teachers were anxious for their assistance.

Seal Point Profile

Seal Point, from the air, looks like a small cluster of tightly packed houses in the middle of a vast, vacant land. The community is located on a river, and people put up summer fish camps about thirty-five miles from the village where the seals and whales come each year. There are no trees near Seal Point. The closest wood grows about twenty-five miles to the southeast.

Of the two-hundred villagers, most are under the age of twenty-one. Extended families averaging five to seven people live in small sixteen by twenty foot homes. Children are commonly adopted by grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other relatives. Some parents live in other villages and cities within the state because of school and employment responsibilities. Adopting is anticipated by some relatives and it is not uncommon to see a strong desire in some relatives to adopt their daughter's or sister's children. Unwed mothers and their children usually live with their parents or grandparents and assist in the subsistence activities of the family. Some elders speak of their desire that their children and grandchildren come to help them because it is difficult for them to carry on the chores and subsistence activities that are necessary for survival in the village. While grandparents might tend to spoil their grandchildren, both adopted and otherwise, they also lay the foundation for strong family

ties and the expectations that come with those bonds. Most children remain in the village or return to the village either after high school or after some college or technical training. Breaking ties with the extended family is unheard of and considered unnatural. In Kaavik the Wexlers needed to lock their door, but they saw no need to do so in Seal Point. Children flow in and out even when no one is home.

No graffiti or broken windows mar the school, students seem to take pride in their school and consider it their place. The villagers expect students to be able to master basic skills and want the school to offer electives like Inupiaq, subsistence, and shop. The gym is a hub for social activities between villages and within the village.

Most of the community's wage employment is derived from the city office, the Native corporation, and the school district. Occasionally, state-affiliated agencies such as Rural Cap provide local summertime construction work or capital projects and improvements, but this work is spotty. Many of the men are involved in the National Guard which pays a minimal monthly wage and offers other benefits. In the summer, some residents are hired by the Bureau of Land Management as emergency firefighters. People also earn money selling furs, wood, meat, and bootleg alcohol and drugs. Some women sell woolen socks, mittens and skin-sewn products, while a very few men, mostly elders, sell ivory carvings and other artwork in the larger markets within the state. Many families rely on food stamps and welfare checks. Cash is at a premium and credit systems are extensive.

A twenty-four-hour cable television set dominates the homes of even the poorest of families. Rick and Caroline could walk through Seal Point at any hour and see the blue flicker of a television screen through the windows. Most students dress in high top Reeboks, jeans, and J.C. Penney catalog clothes. Only the elders speak the Native language fluently; most people speak a dialect of English.

Despite these western influences, the town of Seal Point is still organized into a traditional arrangement of closely packed houses. The extended

family and traditional values are maintained, and the people still consider themselves set apart from American culture. Although people speak of retaining their Native traditions, it is obvious to newcomers like Rick and Caroline that it is just a matter of time before many of the traditional values are lost. The hope and future of Seal Point lies in the education of the children, but the Wexlers saw little evidence that education was a priority.

First Impressions

The wind blows most of the time in Seal Point. Caroline was disappointed with the housing the principal had arranged. The wind whipped through the hole in the wall and the cracks in the windows. A small, inefficient oil stove kept the house at fifty degrees. Caroline was used to roughing it, however, and the place did have four walls and a roof—and all for a modest $325 a month! There was no water or sewer, but Rick could haul water, garbage, and waste with their dogs. No one offered to help them; teachers figured they could pay some kids to do any grub work.

All the teachers had snowmobiles and sleds attached to three-wheel ATVs and carts. They enjoyed hunting together and traveling to a nearby wet village on occasional weekends. One teacher even had an airplane. None of the teachers owned sled dogs, and there were only a few teams in the village. The principal and teachers seemed to believe sled dogs were silly, when you could travel and hunt more efficiently with machines. Don Damart gave Caroline the impression that he did not appreciate having the dogs so close to his trailer. Rick was hoping Don or some of the other teachers would invite him to go hunting soon since they needed meat. When Rick hinted, Don told him just to buy meat from one of the Native guys in town. Rick got the impression he was not going to be accepted by Don as an equal, friend, or member of the teacher group at the school. Rick was right, and their dislike for each other began to grow.

Don was distant, unfriendly, terse, and quiet. His small, close-set eyes bored through Caroline and always made her uncomfortable. She would

smile and say hello each morning to Don, only to be greeted by a grim, blank face and a cold pass in the hallway. Why did he hate her? She might be overly sensitive, she thought, since she was three months pregnant, but Don seemed nice enough to the other teachers.

The shop teacher, Eric, and his girlfriend, Karen, did seem friendly and invited the Wexlers over for dinner. Karen, an elementary teacher, did not care for Don Damart's dictatorial handling of the teaching staff at the school. She also had had a few disagreements with Don over reading test scores and classroom organization. It was only January and Karen was already planning to transfer out next year.

Eric asked Rick, "Why did you wait two days before you showed up at the school?"

"Well," Rick replied, "I thought it was best to get settled in first and try to catch my breath after our recent bout with the flu. Besides, I did show up, but Don was so busy battling the school generator, trying to thaw out frozen pipes, and dealing with blown lights in the gym . . . I just thought that it would be better to make introductions and get the tour another time."

"You know, Don was wondering where you guys were and why you took so long to come by. Finally, we offered to pay you a visit," said Eric with a wry smile.

"I'm sorry," Caroline apologized. "I thought we'd come in after two days or so and be prepared to begin teaching right away."

"Why didn't you just do your student teaching in Kaavik? We thought you were going to arrange something with them since you've lived there for a while," said Eric.

"We had already committed to coming to Seal Point before Kaavik gave us the OK, so here we are," offered Rick.

Karen interrupted, "Gee, Eric, Don didn't even tell us they were definitely coming until three days ago. I think he's glad you did decide to come here. You know, Edwin's leaving in a few days."

Rick and Caroline gave each other a concerned look. Edwin was to be their mentor and they were hoping that he'd be around to give them a proper introduction to classroom organization, the students, and the curriculum. The Wexlers didn't ask Eric and Karen to explain further. The hour was getting late and they all had classes the next day, so they said good-bye and went home.

Part II:

The Wexlers in Seal Point

Caroline's Story

The morning that Rick and Caroline started classes at Seal Point School dawned clear and windless. A pink hue glinted off the river ice and the school was shrouded in generator steam. It was 7:45, and each day would begin at 8:00 for the teachers and 8:45 for the elementary students.

Caroline looked around for Edwin Jamison, her cooperating teacher, but he was nowhere to be found. She did see Karen Mueller and Eric; they were getting showers at the school. Another teacher, Jon Kirk, smiled at Caroline and said, "Good morning! I'm Jon, the Special Ed. teacher here. I'm glad that you've come to work with us. After you get settled, I'll show you around my classroom and maybe we'll have some time to get to know each other better, but right now I have some prep work to do. See you later!" A woman walked by and said, "Hi, I'm Joanne Dixon Kirk. I'll talk to you later after I have my morning coffee. We've been waiting for you." Caroline thought the Kirks looked like coffee achievers and figured she'd better perk up with a little brew herself this morning, although she usually drank tea.

Being pregnant, Caroline was having a difficult time feeling perky in the morning, but she tried to maintain a happy and professional attitude. The words from her UAF teacher came back to her, "Personal warmth, professional distance . . ."

Caroline was walking back to Edwin's classroom when she saw a tall, dark-haired figure coming down the hallway from the gym. "This must be Mr. Jamison," she thought. He was a big man, about two hundred and seventy pounds, heavily bearded, and gruff looking. He reminded her of a great bear or a football lineman. She introduced herself and he said hello in a low tone.

"I guess that we'll be working closely together over the next few weeks. I'm looking forward to learning a lot about teaching English and writing from you. You know, I heard that you took the Writing Project. I'm very interested in learning about the techniques you use and seeing how you

utilize some of the strategies they recommend," Caroline rambled excitedly. Caroline had a tendency to ramble when she was nervous and for some reason Edwin made her very nervous. "Oh no," she thought, "he doesn't like me either. Why am I here?"

"Listen, I'm a firm believer in learning to teach by teaching. I think it's best to just come in and start teaching right away," Edwin said. "That's the way I learned. As far as the Writing Project goes, we did that stuff last year and this year we're doing literature and reading. I used to work pretty closely with that group and we've had our differences of opinion. Basically, if you want to learn about that, you can take the class yourself. They offer it every summer."

Caroline was taken aback. Edwin's tone was calm, but flippant and condescending. Caroline's face must have reflected her disappointment, but Edwin obviously had other things to contend with. "This is the great mentor I'm supposed to work with? Who recommended this guy, anyway?" she thought to herself.

Edwin's voice called her back from her thoughts.

"Hey, I've got a class to teach. We can talk later about what you'll be doing over the next few weeks."

Caroline decided to put on her brightest smile. She was going to approach student teaching with her greatest effort and do whatever the Seal Point teachers wanted her to do. Once she had her own classroom, she could set it up the way she wanted to. Okay, she reasoned, this guy might not be very helpful, but I'll learn from my own mistakes.

"Thank you for taking the time to talk with me this morning," Caroline countered. "I would like the opportunity to observe you teaching and I hope that you will also take the time to observe my teaching. I promise not to take up a lot of your time, I understand that you're busy."

Just at that moment, Don Damart stuck his head into Edwin's classroom. "'Morning, Ed. Caroline, would you please come into my office as soon as you and Ed are through here?"

"We're through," Edwin said.

While in Don's office, Caroline got her student teaching schedule and learned about Don's philosophy of education. He spoke of academic excellence, fairness, and commitment. Caroline was surprised that Rick would not be working with Edwin as a mentor. Don wasn't clear about who was to be Rick's mentor. The university guidelines, he said, were just that—guidelines. Their UAF coordinator hadn't contacted him yet anyway, so he had taken the liberty of setting up his own schedule for the Wexlers. He told Rick and Caroline that Seal Point had many excellent teachers and all were worthy of the mentor role. The Wexlers would get the opportunity to work with all grade levels and various teachers. This would be a more appropriate introduction to the rural school environment, he felt, since rural teachers usually needed to teach out of their grade and subject areas.

Caroline's first class of the day was to be in Karen Mueller's first/second grade homeroom. The subject was reading.

Karen was happy to have some assistance in her overcrowded elementary classroom. Karen told her that eventually Caroline would take over the class completely and also do some private tutoring with certain reading groups. Karen gave Caroline feedback on her teaching and modeled good classroom management techniques. She took time outside of the school environment to talk to Caroline and Rick and they visited each other often.

Caroline's morning reading class took up two periods. After reading, she had a prep period and went into a small office to write in her journal about the morning's activities and impressions. She also prepared for her second class for the day, high school English/literature.

Edwin taught the high school English class which had about ten students. The first day Caroline observed Edwin's teaching, but there wasn't much to observe since Edwin spent almost the entire period reading *Sports Illustrated*. Most of the students were reading books and getting ready to write their book reports. Two students were asleep and Edwin would periodically wake them up and tell them to read.

After class, Caroline followed Edwin hoping he would tell her his expectations. Edwin told her he hoped she would begin taking over his class that week. He wanted her to give him lesson plans. It was a literature/reading class, he said, but she could do whatever she wanted. Caroline thought about it and suggested that the students all read the same book so they could discuss it together. He said that was fine.

"You can choose a book and photocopy chapters for the student to read. I'm leaving for the Super Bowl in a few days, and I expect you to take over this class and my last period social studies. I'll be gone two weeks, but I think you'll do fine. Just get me your lesson plans in two days. In the meantime, you can take over what I'm doing now and have the students finish their book reports. Some will need help with that."

On that note, Edwin left the room and headed for an alcove by the gym's back door. Caroline could count on finding Edwin there five to seven times a day smoking cigarettes, either with Jon Kirk or a few students.

According to the procedure outlined by their UAF coordinator, Caroline was to spend a week or two observing and getting to know her instructor and students. There was no time for that now. Furthermore, Edwin was not going to be the best instructor to observe. He just monitored the students' behavior and assisted them when they had questions.

It didn't take Caroline long to notice that Edwin's classroom was divided from the principal's office by a sliding curtain instead of a wall. She knew the principal could hear everything that went on in her class if he just tuned in. For this reason, she knew it was imperative to maintain classroom control at all times. If the students became too rowdy or

uncontrollable, there was a good chance Mr. Damart would pop his head into the room to see what was going on. Over the next few weeks, Mr. Damart did just that.

Caroline's next class was with Jon Kirk, the special education teacher. It was a middle school English/grammar class. Most of the students had behavior disorders, hearing/listening problems, or were emotionally disturbed.

Jon took the time to discuss students and materials with Caroline and helped guide her in classroom management. He was the only teacher who continuously observed Caroline's teaching and offered constructive criticism. He supported her ideas and assisted in the implementation of lesson plans. In exchange, Caroline was responsible for checking students' progress and homework. Eventually she was to do a unit plan on writing a research paper with his class. His students needed to be motivated to work by rewards of free time and popcorn parties. Their behavior had to be monitored closely and there was much individual work at listening/learning centers.

Caroline's final class was Edwin's middle school American history course. Edwin clearly enjoyed this class. The students were easily motivated by competition and, although they were boisterous and rowdy, they also listened and learned if a teacher could channel all their restless energy.

As the two weeks of Edwin's absence went by, Caroline came to know her students and enjoyed having total control of her own classes. There were many times she wished she had someone to talk to about problems or questions related to teaching in a new school. Don Damart was no assistance to Caroline at all. He was unsupportive of any of her efforts and too busy to talk to her about any questions or difficulties she might be having. It came to Caroline's attention that any time she did ask for advice or direction, it was noted as a weakness and a demerit on her record. She talked to Jon Kirk and Karen Mueller, but only about the classes she taught for them. Soon, Caroline figured it was best to just talk to Rick about her classes. She knew Rick was having problems of his own,

too, and didn't know how to help him. The principal was pressuring Rick to start an after school extracurricular activity with the students. Rick was at a loss. The students' main interest, basketball, was being met. Rick thought that a dog-mushing club, Aikido, or a computer club might be a good idea.

Caroline, during a faculty meeting, volunteered to coordinate the Battle of the Books at Seal Point. Mr. Damart wanted one of the teachers to do it, but they all said they were too busy to take on another project. They complained of being tired and overworked. Caroline looked around at their pathetic faces. She secretly hoped she wouldn't look so burned out after seven years of teaching. There was no reason why she couldn't do the Battle of the Books competition. It would be fun and exciting to see the kids reading and enjoying the competition. So, to the relief of the Seal Point staff, Caroline offered to take over the coordination of the Battle of the Books. Mr. Damart appeared pleased for the first time and handed her a large box of books and pamphlets of questions related to the readings.

When Caroline told the kids about preparing for the Battle of the Books, they were excited. Caroline would be coaching the ninth through twelfth graders after school. She coerced Linda, the special education aide, to coach the third through eighth graders. Linda was enthusiastic about going to the city to compete. Jon Kirk grudgingly offered to chaperone the trip. He seemed quite tired. It meant two extra unpaid days of work for him. Caroline was excited about going to the city with the students she coached, too. But as things turned out, Jon's wife went instead because Caroline was to continue to be responsible for Edwin's classes while he was gone on one of his many trips.

After her midterm evaluation, it became clear to Caroline that the teachers were aware of her good rapport with students. They liked the way she volunteered to do extra work, always smiled, and had a good attitude toward teaching. They were concerned that she didn't quite have students' behavior in hand. They felt that Caroline needed to set clear limits regarding acceptable behavior in class. The teachers graded Caroline while she was in their presence. Edwin gave her good points,

even though he had only observed Caroline's teaching once. Karen liked Caroline and gave her average to good marks. Jon paid attention to detail and was a little more critical, but Caroline felt that his remarks were constructive and she appreciated his honesty. Jon's wife, Joanne, was there even though she didn't work with Caroline. She didn't understand how the University could accredit teachers in one year, she said. She could think of many other fine student teachers who had a better handle on the mechanics of teaching and classroom control. Of course, she wasn't there to give Caroline a grade, but if she could . . . well, she wouldn't be as kind as the other teachers. What Rick and Caroline needed were more methods classes from the university and a lengthy practicum.

While Edwin was gone, Caroline was going to have the students in his English class do more reading on small towns. Initially, they were going to read *Lake Wobegon Days*. But after Edwin had left for the Super Bowl, the class told Caroline they wished they could do something else besides more reading and book reports. Caroline said she had hoped they might use the video equipment in the corner of Edwin's classroom. The students perked up. Some of them had never learned how to use the equipment and others had last used it when they were in middle school. Caroline decided to change her lesson plans and introduce the kids to making videos and writing their own play. This was going very well when Edwin returned from the Super Bowl two weeks later. Edwin asked how the discussion on *Lake Wobegon Days* had gone. When Caroline mentioned that she had changed her lesson plans and decided to teach the kids video techniques, Edwin seemed disappointed.

"Well, I thought I had already told you we did creative writing last year," he said. "But I said you could do whatever you want, so . . . The only thing I think you shouldn't have done is change your lesson plans because the class couldn't be motivated. But you've already done it so you might as well continue. I can't give you an excellent recommendation on your evaluation because of this. But you seem to be doing well and the students are really interested in your lessons."

Caroline first had the class make their own music videos and then write their own play and perform it in front of the entire school and community. The play was about Native values and won first place in a district-wide video competition. First prize was $500 for the student council coffers. Although they won district acclaim, Mr. Damart and Edwin never gave Caroline the kind of positive reinforcement she was hoping to get. Edwin's comment to Mr. Damart was, "Yeah, Caroline did a good job. But I doubt that she could have pulled this whole thing off if I wasn't there to help the kids with their make-up and part of the set."

It was an unfortunate turn of events when Caroline's pregnancy put her in danger of toxemia. Her blood pressure was high and her legs were swollen from standing all day. Caroline spent more time sitting at her desk and lying down at home after school. She had to be checked daily at the clinic in the village and once had to fly out to the closest hospital for an examination. Doctors were pressuring her to discontinue student teaching and stay in bed. Caroline would hear none of it and continued with her classes. Occasionally, however, she had to go home from school in the afternoon or come in late in the morning because of her pregnancy. The principal and staff at the school appeared sympathetic and understanding of her condition. But as her student teaching wore on, despite Caroline's effort and successes with students, the fact that she was late to school some mornings and had to leave early some afternoons counted as demerits against her.

Rick's Story

When Rick began his first day at the school, he and Caroline were ushered into Don Damart's office. They waited for him to finish several phone calls before talking with them.

"I would like to talk to you about your schedules here at Seal Point and what I feel makes a good teaching experience," he began. "At Seal Point, as at any good school, there are certain rules to follow to achieve the

educational potential of the school and its students." He handed them a list:

1. Objectivity: equal and fair treatment
2. Active Listening: verbally fluent, sense of humor, paraphrase student responses to promote understanding
3. Empathy, warmth
4. Motivation
5. Student-centered style
    a. no stereotyping
    b. recognize effort and improvements
    c. plan for expected and unexpected
    d. model expected behavior
    e. skillful and enthusiastic
    f. allow active involvement of students
    g. student contact: move around
6. Seek in-service and training opportunities
7. Be innovative

When Rick jokingly wondered how to include all this into a twelve-week student teaching experience, Mr. Damart was not amused. He handed Rick a copy of his teaching schedule. Rick was to teach a health education course, clearly out of his area of specialization. He already knew rural teaching necessitated such switching, but health education had not been discussed during previous phone conversations and Rick was caught off guard. To insure harmonious feelings, he said nothing.

Rick would first be working with Ned Brady's general math class. Ned's approach to teaching seemed frivolous yet experienced: he kept the high school kids off guard with his constant joking and unpredictable mood swings. Ned knew the kids well but maintained a respected distance. He had a good sense of humor, made Rick feel welcome, and was glad for his assistance.

Rick was next to work with Joanne Dixon Kirk, who taught the second and third grade math class. Joanne acted the "teacher's teacher"—with a

professional air and distance. When Rick first met Joanne, she was working on lessons in her class. "Hello," said Rick. "My name is Rick Wexler. I'm the student teacher who is to work with you for the duration of my student teaching. Nice to meet you."

Joanne looked up from her work. "Where have you been? We expected you several weeks ago." Rick went into the story of how they were delayed due to illness and bad weather. Joanne said that she expected Rick to meet with her at least twice a week to discuss lesson plans for her class, and Rick agreed. She wished Rick luck in his student teaching. Rick felt somewhat unsettled after this initial exchange.

Rick's third period class was U.S. history. He felt optimistic about this class; it was more closely aligned with his inclination and background. Edwin Jamison was the teacher who normally taught this class. He discussed with Rick what he expected. Edwin seemed preoccupied, as though he had many other things to do.

Rick had a planning period after lunch, and was to teach the health education class sixth period. This was Ned Brady's class and Rick felt apprehensive because of his non-science background and because he had no chance to prepare for this class. The university schedule for student teachers stipulated a gradual assumption of complete teacher responsibility, and Rick hoped to take charge of this class slowly, so he could get a feel for teaching a large high school class in an unfamiliar subject. Ned wanted Rick to take charge of the class as soon as possible. Rick thought the staff at Seal Point had received a copy of the university student teaching timetable, but Ned seemed ignorant of it.

The last period of the day was with Jon Kirk's junior high social studies class of special learners. Rick liked Jon's easy manner and the patient way he talked with students. Jon had very clear behavioral as well as academic objectives for each of his seven students. Rick knew the subject matter and felt confident he would do well with the class.

Ned's math class was the first class Rick was to take over as full-time teacher. In an attempt to tap into an already established routine, Rick began to teach the class as Ned had. He initially spent time discussing with the class what routines to expect and what the rules would be in this class:

1. Be on time and ready to work.
2. Do your work and let others do theirs.
3. Be considerate.

Rick had become familiar with the method of class discipline known as assertive discipline during his practicum experience at a junior high school. He said that consequences for continued non-observance of class rules would be clear. He also said that, should students perform well and finish their work when asked, there would be a method of reinforcing this positive behavior, or rewarding them. The students seemed clear on the class rules and on how they would like to be rewarded for good work. They were intentionally brought into the decision-making process and Rick felt good about this.

Rick was next to work with Joanne Dixon Kirk's second through fourth grade math. At first, Rick was assigned to teach only one group of the class, the "purple" group, which Joanne had organized based on competency tests given early in the fall. Rick was to give direct instruction for about twenty minutes, then assign seatwork, and assist students as needed. At this time, Joanne would give direct instruction to the "red" group. Rick also supervised the most competent students, made up of the last group who worked independently of Joanne or Rick.

Rick asked Joanne how she had organized these groups, and she replied, "I've been working with these kids for years. I know who can do what and I check out the standardized test scores from year to year." She would not permit Rick to view these scores, and wouldn't elaborate on the details of how the various groups were chosen. The dynamics of ability grouping was an important concern for Rick, especially because he knew this to be a vital topic in rural Alaskan schools, and he wondered why Joanne

wouldn't discuss this with him. How did ability, interest, and motivation interact to determine placement in the slower groups or the accelerated groups? Rick had hoped at least to see the placement tests, but this was not to be.

Rick's third period class was history. When he asked Edwin Jamison about which direction Edwin would like him to take the course, Edwin said that he would like Rick to cover approximately five chapters within the twelve-week student teaching period, and use the basal almost exclusively. He instructed Rick to follow a pattern of round robin reading for each chapter and then to dictate a test question one or two days before the test. The tests were to be taken out of an accompanying workbook.

Rick had expected Edwin to act as his mentor and assist him in developing lesson plans for social studies, and to act as a sounding board for any instructional decisions or questions he might have. Edwin didn't seem receptive. "I had no idea you were even coming till two days before you arrived. Since I'm going to be Caroline's mentor, there's no way I could be yours. I'd like to be of help, but there's nothing I can do."

After lunch, Rick taught Ned's large ninth through twelfth grade health education course. "Have fun with this," advised Ned. "But I'll tell you right now, this class will be more an exercise in crowd control than effective teaching." Rick observed Ned in action, and it became apparent what Ned meant. Ned spent much time in verbal banter and outright yelling to keep students from disrupting class. Round robin reading from the textbook was the rule, and Ned would interject humorous comments and elaborate particular points of interest. Occasionally Ned would perform experiments to provide variety.

Rick's final class, Jon Kirk's junior high social studies, provided a nice "breather" after the intensity of the health education class. Jon explained the terminology of the special education class in which Rick would participate. He had elaborate behavior modification and token reinforcement systems in place. The class was awarded points only if the

entire class remained on task. The children responded well and anticipated either a popcorn party or extra free time on Friday.

The school year seemed to be passing by in a blur. Rick's first class was going well—Rick had instituted a weekly math contest where students had to solve math puzzles involving current topics, and he created a "mathematical environment" showing students how math was used in their lives. Students figured out height through the Pythagorean Theorem and determined how many miles per hour people were going when they traveled between villages. At first the students enjoyed the challenge, especially when the winner was awarded a small prize. But the contest lost its novelty. Ned asked Rick to continue the students' progress in a self-paced, worksheet-based "Mathimagination" series. Most students worked consistently, if slowly, and both Ned and Rick were pleased with at least moderate gains.

The students constantly tested Rick to see how far they could go, and a few students seemed especially difficult. Rick knew that he could not imitate Ned's high-energy, intimidating style and that cowing students into doing worksheets day after day wouldn't work for him. He needed something to intrigue students, to capture their imaginations. He conceived of a math-tutorial on the computer addressing each student's area of study.

Again, the newness worked for Rick. Competition was fierce for the computers in the class. But as the novelty wore off, he saw that the perfect motivator wasn't to be found. Rick knew that providing motivation for them day after day was too much to expect of himself. Some motivation must come from within each student, and larger issues—the emphasis placed on education within the community and the Eskimo culture—had to be considered.

Joanne also had a token reinforcement system. "My kids do well when they know what they are working for," she would say. It was easy to see the day to day gains the students were making. "It is vital to emphasize the positive, to take note of what the students are doing well," Joanne told

Rick. Rick tried to follow this advice, but Joanne said that Rick's control was not up to par.

"You are letting the kids get away with too much. I'm beginning to think you could use an additional student teaching." Rick was shocked. Why could she not see that, although he couldn't keep the kids on task as well as Joanne, the students worked consistently and his control of a large elementary class was improving? Joanne and the other teachers' rapport with students was the result of over six years of work at that same school—how could she expect that kind of response from someone there only twelve weeks?

Rick was proud of the results he got from his U.S. history class. The students in this class had just come from Edwin Jamison's class, whose marine-sergeant discipline made him a tough act to follow. Rick would allow them enough time to catch their breath. Although Edwin had asked him to stick to the basal, Rick had chosen a different path from the worksheet-based education favored by most teachers at Seal Point. Since this was a fun topic for him, he used "fun" activities such as map relays, discussions of local events, and even news article summaries from the regional paper. He could teach skills such as learning the basics of using an outline, state and local geography, and regional politics and still cover the chapters Edwin wanted him to.

Rick learned that the students wanted some kind of routine and yet needed a break sometimes. It was crucial to outline clearly his initial expectations and stick to this outline. If Rick recognized any area in which he needed improvement, it was the area of classroom routines.

But Rick's greatest accomplishment occurred because he took a chance and broke from the routine. While in Seal Point, the region decided to incorporate itself as a borough, and Rick thought this too important a current event to ignore. "This is U.S. history in the making, and I can show the students that history is not something you read about but participate in." After reading the borough charter commission's plans to draw up a borough charter, Rick began discussing how this change would affect ev-

eryone for years to come. He drew parallels to the birth of the U.S. Constitution and pointed out that a charter, like the Constitution, defines the powers of a new political body.

But Rick thought that more could be gained from such a once-in-a-lifetime experience. He arranged an audioconference so the class could talk to members of the charter commission. Rick and the class discussed their concerns—possible property taxes and borough services, a state-to-borough land transfer—and they excitedly got ready for the audioconference. The class prepared questions for the commission, and learned about such topics as mill-rates, property taxes, and even charter member election rules.

When the audioconference was over, the members of the commission were impressed with the knowledge of the issues and the depth of the questions the Seal Point students raised. They complimented both the school and the students for showing such an active interest in the formation of their new borough, and thanked Rick and the class for helping to show them that their work was not going unnoticed. Edwin requested Rick to ask one of the commission members to attend their senior commencement exercises.

Rick's health education class was not so easy. When Rick asked the class what subjects they wanted to study, they predictably replied, "sex education, drugs, or sports." But Ned had already covered these topics. A good unit plan, Rick thought, would be centered around health careers. Later he felt he should have known better. "What kind of health careers are modeled here in Seal Point? The kids aren't going to care about jobs, such as X-ray technicians, any more than they will about golf injuries." Class discipline became a problem. Rick tried to enforce the class rules already in place. But once he tolerated slight transgressions early on, he found off-task behavior a continuing problem. He scrambled to establish guidelines for appropriate behavior and to set up a point system that made it plain to see where one stood in the class. He instituted his own class rules that said to the class: "I am not Ned. These are the rules you are expected to follow."

Rick fell back on the basal for the health class. It made it easier for the students to see where they were going, and they were comfortable with this style of learning–especially important, Rick thought, when they were getting used to a new teacher and teaching style. As time went on, and expectations became clearer, the class settled down, but there were rowdy days.

Rick's initial difficulties didn't go unnoticed. The principal and staff brought up the matter during the student teacher reviews, and Rick said he was having trouble since this was such a large class outside his subject area. But he felt he had learned a lot and had made great strides in class discipline. The staff seemed unimpressed. Privately, Ned confided that he knew this was a tough class, and any teacher there would have a degree of difficulty. "If you can teach a class like this, you can teach in the Bush!"

Jon Kirk gradually abdicated responsibility to Rick for managing the social studies class for students with learning disabilities. Jon had told Rick, "I've spent literally hundreds of hours modifying the behavior of some of these kids. You wouldn't believe their behavior just a few years ago." Jon also followed a textbook that covered U.S. geography, map reading skills, and the goods and services produced by each state. Rick enjoyed showing the students how to create a population map, read an atlas, and carry out suggested activities.

Jon showed Rick methods of dealing with particular behavior disorders: time-out carrels, red/green card reinforcement system, student-teacher contracts, and others. Jon was the only teacher who allowed Rick to follow his university timetable in assuming full-time teaching responsibility.

Disaster

Edwin would not let Caroline see his grades or his remarks on her final student teaching evaluation. Rick was having difficulty with collegiality among the teachers, in addition to concerns about his classroom manage-

ment. Joanne Kirk persuaded the staff to agree with her about Rick's need to do another student teaching. The UAF coordinator arranged for him to student teach again during Upward Bound that summer, where a university supervisor could work closely with him.

Before Caroline's student teaching was over, Mr. Damart called Rick and Caroline into his office. They asked him if he would give them a recommendation. He said that he would wait until Rick completed the second student teaching over the summer before he would do that. He needed to get a good evaluation from the UAF coordinator first. Don Damart never gave Rick or Caroline a recommendation. He told the District Superintendent not to hire either Rick or Caroline because of their lack of commitment to the teaching profession. The Wexlers had hoped to work in that district with a full-time teaching contract. They eventually wanted to be placed in Kaavik, the community that they considered home.

Over the summer, the Wexlers had difficulty getting job interviews. The one or two interviews they did get seemed to go well, but things changed once district personnel contacted the Seal Point principal for references. For two "undedicated teachers," the Wexlers became more determined than ever to get a teaching contract and prove Don Damart wrong.

Reflections

When looking back over his twelve-week student teaching experience, Rick had much to be thankful for. Caroline, although pregnant and having problems, finished her student teaching without any major medical difficulty. They both had made good friends in Seal Point, and had made some contacts within the school district in which they hoped to teach. Rick had started an after school dog mushing club and had begun a computer club, too. Both Rick and Caroline had learned a great deal—how to deal with the day-to-day demands of teaching, to employ what they had learned at the university, and much more. They learned that, although they were teaching in a cross-cultural setting, good teaching principles

apply. They had both helped the school gain greater standing within the district, and they felt proud of this achievement.

The Wexlers were also puzzled. They couldn't understand why the staff were so cold to them. Some of the staff, they knew, expected "different" student teachers who were younger and more experienced and who had more drive.

The Wexlers' felt their own expectations had not been met. Several of the teachers exhibited the symptoms of severe teacher burnout: prolonged absences, loud classes, and impatience with superfluous problems (like Rick and Caroline). The Wexlers felt their authority undercut. Rick's health education class was cut short once due to a spelling bee of which he had not been informed. The students picked up on this unspoken "they will be here only twelve weeks and then gone" attitude and both Wexlers had difficulty with class discipline. "Why should we listen to them?" was the students' apparent feeling.

Communications between the university coordinator and Seal Point school were not what they could have been. The Seal Point staff expected the Wexlers to jump right in and start with a full course load. Rick and Caroline had expected to gradually assume duties over the entire length of their stay at Seal Point as the student-teacher handbook recommended. Teachers at Seal Point not only were unaware of the Wexlers' university obligations, but held it against them when they seemed confused about whose directives to follow.

Could staff jealousy of the friendship the Wexlers made in the Native community have been part of the explanation? The Wexlers' closest neighbors, the Fields, were particularly supportive. Rick and Wilson Field went hunting together. Wilson owned dogs, too, and he and Rick ran dogs in the evening and on weekends. Caroline and Mary Field talked, made caribou soup, watched TV, and enjoyed just being together. Wilson and Mary did not care for the principal very much and felt that he played favorites with jobs at the school and kept school positions available only for certain families.

People in Seal Point were interested in racing dogs and although there were few dog teams in the village, enthusiasm for local races ran high. Rick competed in a few local races, which brought him closer to some of the students that other teachers had not been able to reach. The teaching staff at Seal Point recognized the Wexlers' ability to get close to the villagers quickly and easily.

When it came time for Rick and Caroline to leave Seal Point, none of the teachers or the principal wished them well. Rick and Caroline thanked the school staff and they said their formal good-byes. Even Jon, Karen, and Eric were distant and cold now that Rick and Caroline's student teaching was over.

Rick was busy harnessing up the dogs for the trip back to Kaavik. Caroline would be flying there in a few hours. She helped Rick pack the sled and gave him a kiss good-bye. Several people came out to wish them well. They told Rick that they'd miss them and hoped that they would come back there to teach. As Rick got on the sled runners and pulled the hook, he looked up toward the school. There in the yard the aides had all the elementary children lined up along the street where Rick was leaving. They all waved and cried out, "Bye, Rick! We'll miss you! Come back!" Tears welled up in Caroline's eyes as she thought, "Well, we'll be missed by the people who count—our students."

Epilogue

When the Wexlers experienced difficulty finding a teaching position, they made an intelligent decision. Rick Wexler continued his university education in the field of special education, the teaching specialty most in demand in rural Alaska and in nationwide. Caroline stayed home with her new baby. Caroline and Rick both did substitute teaching the following year, and their job prospects were excellent.

The Wexlers generously agreed to write this case detailing their student teaching experience because they believed it could be helpful to other teachers. With the passing of time, they believed, the Seal Point experience no longer had much bearing on their employability.

Discussion Questions

1. Rick and Caroline began a teacher education program preparing them for rural Alaska high schools with distinct advantages. Unlike most of the other students, they had lived successfully in rural Alaska and preferred the village lifestyle. They had hauled their own wood and water, run a dog team, and put up salmon. They had made friends in rural communities and been substitute teachers in rural schools. The Wexlers were committed to rural Alaska and especially wanted to return to the village of Kaavik. When they first came to the university, they lived in a tent to save money during the Fairbanks winter.

An experienced rural principal, visiting the teacher education program, singled out the Wexlers as the students "most likely to succeed" in rural Alaska. He was keeping an eye out for them as potential hires.

But it all went wrong. Rick and Caroline had taken a gamble. They had decided to do their student teaching in the district where they wanted teaching positions the following year. If all had gone well during their student teaching, the gamble would have paid off. The Wexlers would have been a known quantity with friends in the district. When their experience turned sour, they found themselves in much more serious difficulty than if they had chosen to student teach in another district. The district, including Kaavik, was closed to them.

The Wexlers' problems originated not in conflicts with the culture of the community but in conflicts with the culture of the school.

What was the nature of these conflicts? Could these problems have been avoided or, at the least, better managed once they had begun? This case underscores the importance of student teachers understanding not only the culture of the community they are entering but also the culture of the school.

Consider, for example, the Wexlers' initial expectations when they arrived in Seal Point. What exactly did the Wexlers expect in terms of opportunity to observe classes, placement with a mentor teacher, treatment by the other faculty in the school, and relationships with the principal? What were their expectations in terms of their own status in the school? Were these expectations reasonable?

Since the case is written from the Wexlers' perspectives, you have only clues to the viewpoint of the principal and the school faculty. But what can you infer about the nature of the Seal Point faculty's expectations for student teachers? Why were these expectations of the faculty so different from those of the Wexlers from the beginning?

If you consider student teaching an implicit, as well as an explicit, contract with the university, the student teacher, and the school all as parties to the agreement, what exactly are the terms of the contract?

The Wexlers indeed found themselves in a difficult situation, although one not exceptional in rural student teaching. They were expected to pinch hit, right away, for a teacher who was leaving. They were expected to teach classes outside of their fields which they had not expected to teach. They were expected to assume responsibility for extracurricular activities. Worst of all, the Wexlers learned that they were to be shared among the entire Seal Point faculty. In Rick's case and, to a lesser extent Caroline's case, no one assumed responsibility for their education. No teacher served as their advocate and champion.

The dilemma is a delicate one. With little negotiation of the student teaching role, student teachers can find themselves overwhelmed or locked into a bad situation. With much negotiation of the student teaching role, the student teachers risk being perceived as difficult and uncommitted.

If you had been in the Wexlers' situation when first arriving at Seal Point, what might you have done to handle this difficult human situation? How might you have negotiated your role with the principal and the faculty? Given the principal's evident seriousness about teaching and his structured approach ("rules for a good student teaching experience"), how might he have been approached? Could you have involved any third parties to increase your negotiating power?

How did the fact that Rick and Caroline arrived as a couple affect what happened to them? Did the Seal Point faculty look at them as independent professionals? Could the Wexlers have created more separate identities?

2. To what extent might the Wexlers' troubles in Seal Point have been caused or aggravated by the particular alliances with other teachers that they formed?

In entering any new situation, it is critical to be aware of factionalism and the dangers of unwitting recruitment into a dissident faction. Those individuals who seek out and befriend an outsider may be isolates in the community. Developing close relationships with isolates or with one community faction may create suspicion and hostility with other factions and difficulty in gaining access and developing trust.

Think about the Seal Point school as a culture and about the way the Wexlers entered. Note the particular teachers they became friends with. While the case does not tell you directly, what would you suspect are the factional groupings among Seal Point teachers? How can new student teachers avoid becoming embroiled in factional conflicts within the school?

3. The Wexlers' case raises the critical matter of the "attitude" of a student teacher.

After reflecting about the Wexlers' experience, the Seal Point teacher writing an "open letter to student teachers" says, "The first thing I would say to you is to have a positive attitude when approaching your student teaching experience."

The Wexlers' university supervisor makes the same point:

> From what I could determine during my visits and discussions with Seal Point faculty and administration, these folks had become upset with Rick and Caroline's lack of "dedication" or commitment to teaching. Perhaps in the school's eyes, Rick and Caroline were either unwilling or unable to focus on teaching and to work hard.
>
> Since the time of Caroline and Rick's student teaching experience, I have heard numbers of cooperating teachers, including those teaching in larger "town" school districts, declare that the quality they value most in a student teacher is a "professional attitude."
>
> To these teachers, a professional attitude is demonstrated when student teachers devote themselves to the work of teaching, show genuine enthusiasm (even quietly) for that work, and care for the students..."

What was it about the Wexlers that gave the Seal Point faculty the idea that Caroline and Rick were not dedicated teachers with a positive attitude? Do you agree with the Seal Point faculty's assessment? Keep in mind that the Wexlers arrived in Seal Point

with especially difficult problems. Caroline was pregnant and threatened by toxemia later in the pregnancy. The couple was short of money and had a dog team to feed and care for. Why did not these special difficulties evoke sympathy from the Seal Point faculty? To blame either the Wexlers or the Seal Point faculty is not helpful. Can you analyze what happened, how it happened, and why the breakdown in human relationships occurred?

Attitude is an extraordinarily important quality in human interactions. Attitude refers to the posture a person assumes in a situation, a position, or mood. Gilmore (1985), for example, finds that attitude is a critical variable in the way teachers sorted Black students in an urban school. The teachers decided—largely on the basis of the student's attitude rather than the student's skills—whether the student is teachable and worth their own investment of time and energy. Students are tracked accordingly with their life chances severely affected.

The Wexlers' case raises the possibility that teachers sort out student teachers in a similar way. In evaluating a student teacher, the cooperating teacher may be less concerned with skills—the extent to which a student teacher demonstrates the ability to manage a class or plan interesting and effective lessons—than with attitude. Why do you suppose attitude is so important to teachers and so important generally in human groups? What kind of transaction is going on?

If attitude is as critical as this case suggests, the good news is that student teachers need not be excessively anxious about their limited skill in classroom management or other problematic areas so long as they demonstrate commitment, respect for the other teachers, and openness to learning and improving. How does a student teacher communicate a positive attitude, especially in situations such as the Wexlers found themselves, where the student teacher has serious reservations about the quality of teaching in the school?

4. What did the Wexlers learn from their student teaching experience?

Many education students regard student teaching as the most important part of their teaching preparation, the time when they really learn how to teach. At the same time, personal experience can be misleading as with Mark Twain's cat who sat down on a hot stove and learned never to sit again. As you review this case, consider what

lessons and conclusions the Wexlers drew from their Seal Point experience. Did they come away with the right lessons or did they misunderstand important aspects of their own experiences?

5. Student teaching is an established ritual in teacher education. Typically, education students observe the classroom of an experienced teacher, gradually take over the classroom, teach for a period of about twelve weeks, and then turn the classroom back to the experienced teacher.

Consider the policy issue of how to design student teaching in a broader framework. The student teacher is stepping into a classroom where the ways of "doing school" have already been established by someone else. One of the student teacher's responsibilities is adapting to another teacher's philosophy of education and classroom structure. The student teacher can decide merely to follow the routines (often textbook based instruction) of the cooperating teacher or to strike out on his or her own. But how will students react to changes in established routines, whether or not these changes are for the better? Would it be better for a student teacher to take over a class from the start of school, under an experienced teacher's eye? Many intern programs design student teaching in this way: the student teacher is responsible for the classroom for a full school year, receives a small salary, and is supervised by a mentor teacher. Would an internship have been preferable for the Wexlers? How should student teaching be designed? To consider such policy questions is not an entirely impractical exercise. Often education students can design a student teaching experience for themselves that avoids the standard routines and pitfalls.

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Gilmore, P. (1985). Gimme room: School resistance, attitudes, and access to literacy. *Journal of Education*, *167* (1), 111–128.

Appendix A:
An Open Letter to Student Teachers from Seal Point

This is a letter from one of the teachers in Seal Point with whom Rick and Caroline worked. Based on his experience with teachers like Rick and Caroline he is offering advice. Read between the lines. How did he perceive Rick and Caroline's situation?

Dear Student Teacher,

As a former Bush teacher and as a former cooperating teacher, I've been asked to convey some dos and don'ts to you. I must say I had one very successful student teacher who was hired immediately after his student teaching. The other student teacher, with whom I had a terrible time, is also working, but it took him two years to gain employment.

The first thing I would say to you is to have a positive attitude when approaching your student teaching experience. Don't just believe in yourself, but believe in your cooperating teacher. When you are given constructive criticism, accept it for exactly that. One student teacher failed to accept any advice and therefore continued to make the same mistakes. When advised of his errors, he felt he was being picked on and became even more defensive.

This defensive attitude led to a more serious offense which was failure to attend meetings with me and other teachers for evaluation. These meetings are a very important part of your experience and can be invaluable if you maintain a positive approach. You will be drawing on the experience of people who are already successful at what you want to do.

Another mistake this student teacher made was to feel that he couldn't fail. It seemed to be his belief that once he made it to student teaching,

which was a pass/fail course, his success was assured. Not so. The teachers with whom you will be working have been chosen for the program on the grounds of their success in the classroom. You will find that cooperating teachers take a great deal of pride in their success and will not jeopardize either their reputations or their students' educations by endorsing a lackluster performance.

There are many ways to ensure success in your student teaching experience in the Bush. You must prepare yourself in three major areas: academic, material, and physical. Your academic preparedness comes not only from your teacher preparation courses but from the courses you have taken in your subject area. This is not to say that your methods courses are unimportant but you must know the answers to the questions that you ask your students. You must know the history of the area and the people who populate that area. You must be prepared to teach anything.

The second area of preparedness to ensure success is material preparedness. Don't venture into the Bush areas of Alaska wearing tennies, t-shirts, and a baseball cap. The harshness of life in the Bush, while rewarding, contains one overarching commandment no matter where you teach: *Never venture out unprepared, the environment can kill you!* You are forced to travel outside the school if only for your own sanity. No one can lock themselves inside a building for a winter and continue to provide superior instruction or even adequate instruction. And you will find great benefits in meeting parents and elders, in engaging in local sports and recreation, and in just cleansing body and soul with a walk. Listen to the advice of the people who live in the village about what to buy and what to wear. The greatest piece of advice I got before going to the Bush was to keep my eyes and ears open and my mouth shut—Bush residents know a hell of a lot more than you do about survival.

This brings me to the third area of preparedness—physical. This does not mean that you have to be a super bodybuilder, but it does mean you have to maintain your health. The rigors of life in the Bush alone are enough to strain one's body. However, when you add the twenty-five hour workdays eight days a week to keep your class on track and add to that hauling

water, pumping fuel oil, chopping wood, hunting and fishing for food, and sometimes walking to work at sixty degrees below zero in a twenty-mile an hour wind or at twenty degrees below zero in a sixty-mile an hour wind, then you had better be physically able to wait for your three months in the summer to rest.

If I've scared some of you that's good, because I may have saved someone's life. If I've caused you to reconsider your chosen occupation that's good, too, because you may not have belonged in the Bush or in a classroom. If I've caused some of you to redouble your efforts to get to the Bush that's best of all, for you are the next group of teachers to touch the future while ensuring survival of the past. You will be doing what only a select number of people can do—you will be a Bush teacher. Good luck!

Appendix B:
The University Supervisor's View

Little is simple or straightforward when it comes to student teaching, but Rick and Caroline's experience struck me—as an experienced supervisor—as particularly complex and contrary at the time. To begin with, Caroline and Rick insisted that they be placed in Kaavik, or at the least, in the school district which served Kaavik. They seemed to have their minds set on securing permanent teaching positions in Kaavik once they had completed student teaching. In my view, student teaching in a place where the student teacher later wants a job adds another layer of concern for the student teacher, but I know that other student teachers have successfully negotiated the complexities of such a situation. And, generally I believe it's the student teacher's choice to make with eyes wide open to the potential pressures. In retrospect, however, I wonder whether Rick and Caroline's desire to be hired in Kaavik and their apparent view of student teaching as an avenue to that hiring placed a self-imposed pressure on them to perform well, well enough to later gain employment in the same district. Did they see student teaching, in large part, as a lengthy "job interview," as a required steppingstone to their long-term goal of working in Kaavik? Then, there was the freak coincidence of landing in Kaavik on the way to Seal Point, reactivating what seemed to be Caroline and Rick's unresolved ambivalence about student teaching in Seal Point. I wonder whether this couple ever "let go" of Kaavik and opened themselves to the possible learning opportunities and experiences to come in Seal Point. I don't know.

Other factors also complicated the situation. Rick and Caroline's concern over their financial condition—which they had discussed at length during the semester preceding student teaching—continued throughout student teaching. They had a baby on the way and no medical insurance. This added a sense of desperation to their goal of getting jobs. I vividly recall an exchange between Rick and me which occurred at the beginning of my second trip to see them. I had brought a large bag of fresh vegetables and fruit for them as a contribution to their supplies since I would be sleeping over at their house. On his way to the village store for soda pop, I offered

Rick a $10 bill. Looking at it, and then at me, Rick asked, "Is this all?" Probably sensing my surprise and the moment's awkwardness, Caroline quickly chimed in, "That'll be enough, Rick." Another complicating factor was Caroline's pregnancy, which was a risky one medically. Still, she had insisted that she enter and complete her student teaching experience because they both needed to become certified and get jobs. Indeed, on my first trip to supervise Caroline and Rick, I arrived in Seal Point just as Caroline had departed for a larger town because of a medical emergency related to her pregnancy. Yet, she continued her student teaching against the advice of a doctor and school folk.

Setting these factors aside, the situation in Seal Point turned out in other respects to be a challenging one for student teachers to handle. While teaching in a variety of classrooms is common and desirable for student teachers working in small schools, it seemed that Rick and Caroline found themselves responsible to almost everyone in the school. They seemed to be apprenticed to the staff as a whole, rather than each to one (or two) master teachers. This situation may have left no particular teacher feeling responsible for guiding each student teacher's development, responsible for finding time to talk with each of them. Overall, Caroline and Rick were left on their own a great deal, with little routine feedback. It's unclear to me whether or not Rick and Caroline met with teachers when those teachers did want to meet to discuss their regular classroom responsibilities.

In this school, Caroline and Rick had numerous complex roles and relationships to negotiate. Student teaching demands that student teachers navigate a complex relationship with experienced teachers—a relationship that is both social and professional, but a relationship that is of unequal status. Even if the student teacher is knowledgeable and mature, the student teacher almost always comes into the situation having a lower status simply because he or she probably doesn't have equal amount or type of experience as the experienced, mentor teacher does. Naturally, this dynamic varies, depending on the student teacher's background and how the relationship evolves. Often, student teachers do become team-teachers in the classroom or come to be seen as part of a

staff-team in the school. Rick and Caroline had to negotiate relationships with each of the several teachers with whom they worked. Also, like all student teachers, Caroline and Rick walked the thin line between taking initiative and responsibility in a given classroom, and working into the teacher's classroom curriculum and routines. And, they had to walk this line with a number of different teachers, who demonstrated widely varying styles of teaching and views of how student teachers should learn to teach.

Rick and Caroline also had to negotiate the extent of the responsibilities they would take on. Student teachers may not have much to say about what they will and won't do. After all, in small schools, student teachers are an additional educational resource in a setting of limited resources. Teachers and administrators have their own views about appropriate responsibilities for teachers and the timing of taking on those tasks. Sometimes teachers hold views that may differ from the university regarding how a student teacher best learns to teach: for instance, some believe in imitation of a particular teaching style, others in the "sink or swim" method. Although the university coordinator had sent a letter to the school explaining the program's view of student teaching as a time to work under the mentorship of an experienced teacher and the university handbook suggested guidelines to gradually introduce student teachers to their responsibilities, these things did not happen for Rick and Caroline. Sometimes student teachers have room to negotiate their roles and responsibilities, sometimes they don't. Perhaps, as well, Rick and Caroline didn't see the situation as one of possible negotiation, but as more of a cut-and-dried case in which they expected that they would have one mentor teacher each and that the guidebook would be followed to the letter.

While Rick and Caroline's situation was a difficult one, they are not the only student teachers to have had to navigate and negotiate their ways through ill-defined, ambiguous situations. I think of Fran, who worked in a small school setting and Marie, who completed her student teaching in a larger school. Fran's situation demanded that she work with each of the teachers in the K–twelve school in a succession of two to three week stints. This arrangement required that she continually get to know new groups of

students and quickly develop a positive relationship with each cooperating teacher. In addition, Fran coordinated an all-school project to develop an oral history of the community, a task which demanded getting to know the community and its members. Marie, who turned down one student teaching arrangement because it required her to work almost exclusively on her own without routine feedback, found herself moving back and forth between two teachers in the second setting. In Marie's eyes, these two teachers were diametrically opposite in temperament and teaching styles. One did little apparent planning and often "flew off the handle" at little things while the other modeled a business-like organization which at times was disrupted by her tendency to overextend herself. Marie succeeded in negotiating her responsibilities and moving back and forth between these two teachers by finding the positive aspects of each teacher and by never responding to comments made by one teacher about the other. Moreover, Marie demonstrated a positive attitude about teaching, planned her lessons carefully and well, and sought out a variety of teachers in the school to provide additional resources and perspectives. What I especially admired about Marie was her own ability to look at this difficult situation with a flexible mindset.

Let me return to Rick and Caroline's situation. From what I could determine during my visits and discussions with the Seal Point faculty and administration, these folks had become upset with Rick and Caroline's lack of dedication or commitment to teaching. Perhaps in the school's eyes, Rick and Caroline were either unwilling or unable to focus on teaching and to work hard. Since the time of Caroline and Rick's student teaching experience, I have heard numbers of cooperating teachers, including those teaching in larger "town" school districts, declare that the quality they value most in a student teacher—especially at the beginning of their experience—is a "professional attitude." To these teachers, a professional attitude is demonstrated when student teachers devote themselves to the work of teaching, show genuine enthusiasm (even quietly) for that work, and care for the students. I have often heard cooperating teachers complain about student teachers who also work part-time. Many cooperating teachers see this (even if it's financially necessary) as a sign that the student teacher is not fully focused on the work of teaching. Cooperating

teachers also want student teachers to be willing to learn from their experiences and mistakes and from what they as experienced teachers have to share. Cooperating teachers value student teachers who say "I'll try." Yes, the student teacher's adequate performance of teaching skills still matters, but it seems that teachers are willing to overlook rough performance when a novice is trying hard to do well by students and is getting better with experience.

Individually, Caroline and Rick had some good and creative teaching ideas. Notably, I was impressed with Rick's efforts to connect his students with the events of the area borough creation during his government class. Caroline displayed a flair for creativity in the language arts. She deserved to feel proud of herself for her students' first place in the district video contest. Still, they lacked, as many beginning teachers do, a sense of how to manage classroom organization and assert classroom authority appropriate to the situation. This was more of a problem for Rick, as was long-term planning and daily lesson organization. As a result of my own concerns about Rick's readiness to lead a classroom full-time on a daily basis, I agreed with the Seal Point staff's recommendation that he extend his student teaching experience. I was also interested in helping Rick and Caroline get the recommendation that they wanted from the principal. I knew that Rick's willingness to add to his experience was the only avenue in the principal's view for Rick to demonstrate his ability to put it all together and to give evidence of his commitment to teaching.

During Rick's five-week supplementary experience the summer following his student teaching, he taught a computer class for Native high school students aspiring to go to college in several years. I think that Rick felt more comfortable in this setting than he had in Seal Point. Computers are an interest area for him, he had complete control over the curriculum, his students were taking the course as an elective, and he had only the one course to teach each day. With Rick in town, I was able to observe him one to two times a week, and we discussed his plans frequently. Rick demonstrated to me a better grasp of long-term planning (although I still had to push him to get these plans in my hands so we could discuss them), a good sense of classroom organization, and an increased ability to act as a

classroom leader. He seemed to have better rapport with the students than he had shown with the Seal Point youngsters. He joked quietly with students, connected nicely with individuals, intervened proactively to divert inappropriate behavior. He seemed to have a better sense of where each student was in relation to the curriculum. I think Rick felt proud of his work and more confident. I was pleased, too, with his increased skills. At the end of this experience, I wrote Rick a positive recommendation, and let the Seal Point principal know how things had turned out.

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